



# CITY OF NEWTON, MASSACHUSETTS

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes **with amendments as approved at June 8<sup>th</sup> meeting**  
May 11, 2010 – 7:30pm

### Attendance

*Commission Members:* Daphne Collins (Chair), Philip Plottel (Vice Chair), Jerry Adams, Charles Eisenberg, Bruce A. Gold, Jane Ives, Peter Kai Jung Lew, John Pears, Carol Ann Shea

*Staff:* Candace Havens (Interim Director Planning and Development Department), Amanda Stout (Sr. Economic Development Planner)

*Guests:* Chris Steele

*Absent:* Jack Leader (Secretary), Matt Cuddy, Robert Gifford

### Agenda Items

On May 7, Caroline O'Leary announced in writing her intention to resign from the Economic Development Commission. On May 10, Chris Steele's appointment was approved by the Zoning and Planning Committee of the Board of Aldermen and will next go before the full Board.

#### **1. Vote on April 13<sup>th</sup> Minutes**

Motion to approve, Chuck; seconded, Peter; unanimously approved.

#### **2. Old Business Update**

Candace Havens provided an update and clarification on the status of several projects.

- **Riverside** – the City is still waiting to hear about a public meeting to be held by Normandy (the developer). Normandy submitted documents to the City for MEPA (Massachusetts Environmental Protection Agency) review. There are copies in the Clerk's office and library. This will determine whether the project needs an EIR. There were questions about Normandy's financial viability, but this is not something the City reviews. There was concern about the fact that the proposed development is smaller (approx. 800-900,000 square feet) than the Comprehensive Plan suggested could be supported on the site (approx. 1.3 million square feet) and some wondered about the reasons for compromising with a smaller development. The Commission warned of the substantial cost to the future well-being of the community of underdeveloping the largest site in the City.
- **Mixed-Use Zoning Study** – Juris Alksnitis has temporarily returned to work in the Planning and Development Department and will be working on a rezoning proposal for the Riverside site. It is anticipated that the Riverside site will be rezoned for mixed-use (not an overlay). Mayor Warren is creating a Mixed-Use Task Force, chaired by Phil Herr, to add to the Comprehensive Plan for the type of development the City wants to see rather than reacting to development proposals.
- **Austin Street** – the RFI is ready for review and it is going through the Real Property Reuse process, since it is on City-owned land. Soon, the RFI will be released and the City will expect responses about what developers might propose on the site. Later, there will be a public hearing, followed by a release of an RFP. There was discussion about the UMass Lowell case regarding bidding laws and 30B procurement.
- **Green Communities Act** – the City is finalizing the application, including projects on which to spend a possible \$1million in grant money. It is a competitive process with over a dozen communities applying.



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- **Chestnut Hill Square** – developer has come forward with a smaller project than previously presented and is offering the same mitigation strategies as the older, larger proposal. At some point, the EDC might invite the developer to present the project at a meeting.

### ***3. Discussion of Economic Development Commission Goals for 2010***

The group reviewed key documents:

- City Code 22-95
- Comprehensive Plan
- EDC Letter to Mayor-Elect Warren, November 10, 2009
- FY11 Planning and Development Department Budget Presentation, Economic Development goals for FY11

The group discussed that the EDC might have three main areas of influence:

- Projects that the EDC keeps tabs on and weighs in on
- Projects that the EDC incubates (such as Newton Centre and Newtonville in the past)
- Structural changes within the City to make processes more responsive and predictable

### ***Short-Term Goals and Strategies (June – December 2010, to be documented in an Annual Report)***

- Streamline the City's permitting process and address structural changes to make the City more responsive
  - Predictability is important
  - Move towards "bio-ready" community silver or better (Newton is currently bronze)
- Investigate Regional Economic Development Agencies
  - Other regions in Massachusetts have them (e.g. BRA, 495 Metrowest Partnership); Newton is a member of MAPC's Inner Core and the 128 Business Council
  - Look into best practices and ways that Newton can actively partner with neighboring cities and towns
- Actively monitor advancement of and assist:
  - Riverside
  - Newton Centre
  - Austin Street/Newtonville
  - Chestnut Hill Square/Route 9
  - Needham Street
  - Other?
- Gather data on economic development metrics and statistics
  - e.g. Class A office vacancies

### ***Long-Term Goals and Strategies***

- Newton Centre position paper
  - The EDC would like to monitor active projects in Newton Centre for consistency with the *Newton Centre Task Force Report*



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- Suggested that in early 2011, the EDC draft a one-page position paper on how the progress with Firefighters' Triangle, Cypress Street and other projects fit in with the overall plan
- Some members of the EDC feel a great deal of ownership on this and don't want to walk away from what they have started
- Perhaps a sub-committee could address the implementation of plans proposed by the Task Force
- Zoning process simplification (get involved in efforts to change the special permit granting authority, etc.)
- Re-zoning
- Parking
- Washington Street (mentioned as a priority by EDC, but does not seem to be on the front-burner of the City at the moment)

The EDC is a resource to be utilized and a source of support. The group wants to be charged with a task(s) to help accomplish the City's Economic Development Strategy. At the next meeting, EDC members will sign up for working on the short-term tasks.

Other ideas that came up during brainstorming:

- Economic Development Incentive Program (EDIP) – MassDHCD tax incentive program
- Future village studies – Newtonville? West Newton? Washington Street corridor?
- Discussion about how to make Newton more “business-friendly”
  - Lack of predictability is a problem, especially when compared to some of our neighboring cities and towns
  - Special permits for small projects are a problem
- Newton should seek out grant money for projects

The meeting adjourned at 9:30pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Amanda Stout

Sr. Economic Development Planner